

STEVE DAVIS – INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Blush Salon and Make-up Studio

INTERVIEWER: Candacy Taylor
INTERVIEWEE: Steve Davis
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40 S. Main St. Yardley, PA 19067

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SD – Steve Davis (Interviewee)

CT: I'm in Yardley, Pennsylvania at Blush Salon and it is September 2nd at 2:26pm. Will you please state your full name and the number of years you've been doing hair?

SD: My name is Steve Davis. I've been doing hair for about twenty years now.

CT: Were you always in this area or did you work in other places?

SD: I started out on the Main Line area of Philadelphia, I was there briefly and then I moved out to Bucks County at another start up in the area. Shortly after that myself and my wife started our own place which is now Blush Hair Salon and Make-up Studio.

CT: How long have you been here?

SD: Been here eleven years.

CT: I'm not going to do a full-length interview because of the time constraints but what I most want to talk to you about is how you got the "Best of..." in the Philadelphia Magazine.

SD: Philadelphia Magazine...we had done some of their big galas, myself and my staff, my wife included, she had her make-up artist down there and we got to know some of the people, they were pleased with our work. Eventually one of the editors had come to Blush to try me out and she came back again six weeks later and I thought, *Hmm this is probably a good thing*. They send their team of editors from salon to salon all through the area, I guess looking for hidden gems. Two weeks later, I got home, my wife handed me a cold beer and said, "You won hair colorist 2012." So I was pretty happy about that.

CT: How often do they choose places outside of Philadelphia?

SD: I don't know that it's that often. That's why I wasn't necessarily anticipating anything past that. I was happy to have the privilege to be part of their gala and stuff like that, so yeah I was pretty happy.

CT: So where are you from?

SD: Originally, Philadelphia

CT: Where else have you lived?

SD: We live in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Which is thirty minutes from Yardley.

CT: Why did you choose to do hair?

SD: I had gone to school, college, and I was working in a hospital while I was in undergrad and I thought that I wanted to be in the medical field and just decided that I hate this. At the time I was dating a girl who was in the hair industry and I had my father's friend who was also in the hair industry. He said, "Why don't you come and hang out for the weekend?" I went there and I hung out and I said, "Wow, I can make a living doing this and this seems like fun." The following week I was enrolled in hair school and that was it. Loved it ever since.

CT: What's the best part of the job?

SD: I happen to like immediate gratification. I wouldn't be able to do something that my investment now might not show a return for, you know, a week or a year. Also I *love* to make people happy which is really the underlying principle of this whole job.

CT: What don't you like about it?

SD: It can be challenging when people don't have the raw materials, meaning the hair or whatever to provide what they want, so you kind of feel like you can't deliver sometimes and the expectations are high. But for the most part it's all positive.

CT: How often does that happen, that people want something that's just not conducive to what they have?

SD: There are two situations. Some people don't have the hair to achieve what they want and some people want you do something that's just not good for them.

CT: I thought that was interesting in just the little blurb that was written about you. These women came in wanting the Marilyn Monroe blonde and you steered them away to something else. How hard was it to convince them that maybe you know better?

SD: Being able to slowly incorporate what you want to do, incrementally, is the key that I've found over the years. Subtle changes for blondes are considered dramatic changes, especially for blondes. The most subtle lowlight, meaning taking a light piece of hair and making it slightly deeper, in their eyes, it's all relative, they're seeing something dramatic when that color comes off when they get blown dry. So I always try to implement something slow even if they *think* they want something dramatic, I won't do it. They know I'm not the man for that. I will not take somebody blonde and make them brunette, for instance, in one shot. I just won't do it.

CT: Why not?

SD: Because I know it's not what they want. And I know when they go home and their husband looks at them and the husband's going to lose his mind and then the wife's going to lose her mind and then she's going to call back and say, "I want this all out." Dark going lighter is not easy because that's where you're going to cause your maximum damage and it's just not a

situation you want to get into. But the psychology behind it is with blondes is that even if it's a bad blonde they don't realize that they're addicted to the bright and they really don't want to be dark, they just need to be a better blonde, in my opinion.

CT: What percentage would you say are regular customers?

SD: My client base is 90% return clientele.

CT: So you kind of know about them, so say they're going through some kind of life change is that generally when they want to make a radical change?

SD: I think there are two triggers. Seasonal changes and also yes, dramatic life events kind of trigger people to go into a direction that may be too aggressive than they can handle. Somebody who's on the verge of a breakdown, you can see it in their eyes, in their stress and you have to talk them out of it. And say, "Hey, let's take a step in that direction and leave you the option to back out of it." Or "When you come back in six weeks, I'll put even more of that in there, if you're feeling it." I think it's reckless to just go on a whim with somebody who you know their personality and you know they're asking for something and it's not their baseline. You're going to get yourself in trouble. My opinion.

CT: Have you learned that from personal experience?

SD: Correct, very early on.

CT: What happened?

SD: I had a pregnant woman one time who came in with long hair, dark hair and she was just freaking out and she said, "I want a dramatic change. I need a dramatic change." And we cut her short and we took it dark and made it a little funkier and it was probably the worst thing I could have ever done. I realized that she was looking at it through the eyes of all kinds of hormonal stimulation and feeling overweight...it was not a good idea. So that's why I don't do *anything* like that unless I firmly know that somebody wants something.

CT: Can you talk about why you think blonde is so popular? What percentage of your clients want to be blonde and why do you think that is?

SD: Well I think the traditional reason why people want to be blonde is because I guess it's associated with a lot of stars in Hollywood and fashion. I think people generally like to feel lighter and brighter, I think that's a big part of it. It makes them feel happier when they look at themselves, especially on the east coast. The trend usually is to take people going darker in the fall but in my opinion I think it's just the opposite. People want to feel brighter because we deal with so much of the doom and the gloom in the winter, and people are locked in the house. So the psychological impact of blonde I think is great. I think that's a big part of it. And again, it's not my personal opinion, but people feel they are sexier when they have that long blonde hair. And a lot of women think that men *love* blonde hair. Which in high percentages is true. I don't have a personal preference. I think women look great brunette, blonde, red, it's just a matter of the *appropriate* red, blonde or brunette on them.

CT: I listened to a podcast of this woman, she talked for twenty minutes about what it took for her to get what I think she called, "winter wheat blonde." It cost her a ton of money and all this time and then I guess because they really had to strip her hair...can you walk me through the process of what you have to do to get someone to that pinnacle of blonderness?

SD: My personal opinion of blondes who I consider lifers, I call it “blondage” because it is a form of blonde bondage and there are a number of things that have to fall in place to keep somebody blonde. I will not personally keep somebody blonde if they are not following all the steps. Meaning if they make the decision to go blonde and they have dark hair naturally, you’re going to incur a certain amount of dryness...damage, it’s just part and parcel when you make that decision so [I ask] Are you willing to keep up with the maintenance that it requires to keep this blonde going so you’re not walking around for three months with black root/blonde hair? Because that does not reflect well on me if you’re not going to maintain the color. So there is the financial implication, the time implication. You *need* to come in every six weeks, to have either a retouch and highlight or a retouch by itself to keep this going. There’s also the home care regimen that blondes *cannot* skimp on because if the hair’s not kept in good condition that means the palette that I’m using to put color on won’t retain that color and the color will not look its best. So those are the three or four things that I mention when I have the initial discussion. If I think that you’re not the one that’s going to do this or if at some point I see that that person is not keeping up with this, I’m going to suggest strongly that we get to something that’s a little more moderate that fits their time and their pocketbook. It’s the highest maintenance: being dark and wanting to be blonde.

CT: How many natural blondes do you see?

SD: I would say possibly 20%

CT: That seems high to me even. Because if you’re young and you have blonde hair, most people grow out of that but if you at least started out blonde it’s probably easier for you as opposed if they were Italian.

SD: Yeah, exactly.

CT: Do you deal with any ethnic hair at all?

SD: We do. We have a lot of Spanish. We do have some African American clients. I think there’s a certain point where...ethnically if your hair is extremely dark and coarse, I think it’s a disservice to allow somebody to try to be a pale blonde because the hair’s not going to be able to hold on long enough. We do warmer tones, bronze, like a warmer brown. That means you don’t have to take that hair and beat it up to get it as light as you need to go. That person is not going to be able to have that hair to the length they want it to be. Again getting to that whole “blondage” thing. Will the hair support that color? In my opinion it doesn’t often do that because you’re dealing with the damage and then if they have chemical treatments on top of it and if they want straightening, so no, I don’t recommend going in that direction. Caramel highlights on ethnic hair is what I recommend. That’s the max light I recommend. And there are people, you know African American women, Spanish American women who have really short cropped hair that go platinum but you know that hair is *severely* compromised. But they’re going more for impact. They’re not looking to have sleek, silky hair. They’re looking for impact and I understand that too. There is a time for that and that is a specific client who wants that.

CT: Yes, but it’s your job to know the difference.

SD: Correct.

CT: So what’s the most popular celebrity right now that people want to look like?

SD: A lot of people are talking about the Miley Cyrus cut. She’s got her hair all cropped up in the back and disconnection in the front.

CT: What's that mean, "disconnection" it's longer in the front?

SD: Meaning it's all cropped in the back, underneath and then the top piece lays over so the front is the longer section, which is the focal point. So those two lengths do not blend.

CT: So the Jennifer Aniston look lasted a long time didn't it?

SD: That flat ironed, straighter look carried through for a decade, at least. And even when the style changed, it was either a shorter or slightly more layered version of her haircut. It's a great haircut. The problem was that most people who were wearing the front pieces of their hair so straight, it's not flattering on a lot of people. You need more softness. That hard line all the way around somebody's profile was just hard for 90% of the clientele. It was just one of those things where that's what people wanted and they didn't look at the big picture. They didn't look at them, with the hair, they just looked at the hair.

CT: It's like when Bo Derek got braids.

SD: Oh yeah.

CT: In the '70s and all these white women got braids and most people can't pull that off (laughing).

SD: That's true.

CT: I think Hallie Berry is another celebrity with a popular haircut but I think people just really want to look like Hallie Berry.

SD: Yeah, you've got a challenge there.

CT: What are the other celebrity hairstyles that have been popular?

SD: I would say the biggest ones have been Jennifer Aniston and even Courtney Cox, a lot of people liked her haircut for a long time. And most recently I would say the blonde girl who just played Marilyn Monroe, that short croppy blonde. I can't think of her name offhand. She was a big one, but again, a really impactful cut, not soft. Another I would say is Lisa Renner. She has that medium length, really choppy cut. Brunettes are attracted to her because she has that deep base and puts that caramel in there. She can't support that blonde because she has that strong ethnic, Italian hair. That's a perfect example of a stylist and a colorist, really doing her justice.

CT: What about Latino hair. Do you steer them away from being blonde?

SD: Yes. Because one lifting session will not take you light enough and you'll have plenty of orange in there. You can't make orange pale. You have go back and lighten it again, and by that time, even if you get the color to where you want it, the hair is compromised to the point that the hair can't hold that color. So it's going to fade out quicker, you're going to have off-tones faster and that's a *huge* commitment for somebody's pocketbook. You are going to have to really want that. You're going to have that dark, black root coming in in three weeks and you're going to have to come back in. The amount of time it looks bad is almost the amount of time it looks good.

CT: Have you seen people go beyond their means to be blonde?

SD: Oh yes, sure. And I try to be realistic. I try to be straight with them. If I see two sessions go by and I know it's just not working and I say, "Let's go in a different direction. I'll keep you blonde around the face. Let's just start to walk this back a little bit so we get into something a little more believable." But you do run into that thing that even if somebody agrees with you and they say they want to go darker when they see it...[they don't like it] and then they want to go back to square one again. When it works well is when people start to go grey. And then the blonde plays right into that because you're drawing less attention to the opposite affect. When people start to grey that's when I start to recommend that we sneak some blonde in there because at the root it's not obvious when it comes back. It's just the opposite for people who are dark and want to stay dark and are getting grey. I suggest they start to blonde it up a little bit, otherwise your maintenance is going to be two or three week retouches and there's no way around it.

CT: Did you ever see the documentary by Chris Rock, *Good Hair*?

SD: No. He's a funny dude though.

CT: Ok, a lot of people saw that. A lot of people who were not black saw it, which was interesting. The premise was his daughters who were I think were five to seven years old asked their daddy, "Why don't I have good hair?" because they have African-American textured hair. And he was really upset and confused by this and he went into the beauty industry and saw all the money, especially black women, are spending on their hair to get extensions and showed how corrosive lye is to straighten hair. So it was really eye opening for a lot of white people who didn't realize how much black people go through for their hair. I'm black and I've gone through a lot with my hair throughout my life. I don't necessarily spend a lot of money on it and I think what he represented wasn't entirely true but part of what I am realizing is that white women go through a lot too, and especially to be blonde. I've read that only about 3% of women are really naturally blonde.

SD: Yeah, for really light blondes you're going to be in that range. From level system 1-10, 1 being the darkest, 10 being the lightest about 25% of the people are in that 7-8 range, which are easily blonde and don't have all that maintenance. Getting back to your original question...everybody want something they don't have, white, black, blue, purple, whatever it is, it's [human] nature and I think when it comes to hair, with women, that's the thing that drives them the most. I would say there's as many white women getting Keratin treatments now, which would be the equivalent of a lye relaxer for a black girl and they're getting it in droves, because they want texture that they don't have. They're dark and they want to be blonde. Their hair is fine and they want to have body so we give them extensions. Yeah, I would say that holds true for every ethnic group you can possibly think of. It's just the way it is. The technology is so much further along now. It's good to see that even in the black community they're kind of starting to walk away from the lye, because the lye is brutal. I did assist a black woman for about a year at a salon I worked at. I learned it very well from her. I didn't feel comfortable ever doing it because it's one of those things that's so...you have to know [what you're doing] and the timing is so important, the prep and etc...so I did learn it, I did see it but the technology is moving a little bit away from that lye and they have alternatives to that that aren't so harsh. That's awesome too because again, getting back to that conditioning thing, you lose options when your hair is compromised. You lose color options big time. You lose length options because your hair won't support the length. It's too beat up.

CT: So what do you think of the Keratin Treatment versus the Brazilian Blowout, because the Keratin has the formaldehyde in it right?

SD: The ones that work have the formaldehyde in them. When the Keratin treatments first came out the theory was, *we are going to put as much formaldehyde in this product and as much Keratin and*

see what we can get to stick with heat. The new generation, in the last year or two, which is one of the products I carry, essentially what they're doing is there's a pre-treat that makes the hair want to receive Keratin, when the Keratin goes on you use much lower heat, much less fumes, we have a vacuum system that we use downstairs overhead.

CT: Did you always have that or did you have it installed?

SD: I've had it for two years now. A room system and an actual local system, so that clients and stylist aren't dealing with that. But the bottom line is that the products we use now are much, much, much lower than the originals. In order to be OSHA approved, that's kind of where it's headed you have to have that. Now we do have some black clients who get the Keratin and it's enough for them. They just want more pliability, it's an easier style, they don't want to have the lye-type straight, because you know you lose body and stuff like that too. So if that's what you're going for then that's great. We do have other thio-based straighteners that can take more body out. Are they going to make it as straight as the lye did? No. But then you're not dealing with that harsh...

CT: That's interesting because I've been to some Dominican salons that are doing the Dominican Blowout and they aren't using the chemical, they're using heat and the labor of blowing it straight. Some say you really have to know what you're doing because a lot of these Brazilian dryers are much hotter than the average dryer and really the process was made for Latino hair, which is stronger and not as fragile as black hair. So for some black people the Keratin Treatment works really great, and for others, all that heat is even more damaging than the lye used in relaxers so I guess it's about having a professional understand what is good for *your* hair.

SD: Yeah, that's the final variable is who is doing this to you and what are they recommending you do and how are they doing it? That's why, in my opinion, high heat, especially with a metal implement on your hair, I don't care what your ethnicity is. High heat...if your ultimate goal is to straighten your hair out, especially in the long term, it's probably not going to be a good thing. So the new generation in Keratins are not requiring that high heat to activate the product. They're actually making the hair...I'll use the analogy of a magnet, the hair *wants* the Keratin on it, it's ready to receive it. It goes in automatically and you're just running a coating over it.

CT: So how do you get it in there, do you still flat iron it?

SD: Still heat, but you don't go anywhere near 400 degrees where minimum of 450 [degrees], with the Dominican and the [Brazilian] blowouts. That's a huge amount and anything under 400, is even safe for white hair. If you choose to use higher heat and a lot of people want that hair laying against their face, it's going to come at a cost. It's going to hurt your hair and eventually, it's going to give up.

CT: I'm learning a lot. No one has broken it down in terms of degrees before so that makes a lot of sense. I would like to talk about the physical labor of the job. What parts of your body do you think are more affected than others?

SD: My brain. Most hair stylists would complain about their back.

CT: Upper or lower?

SD: Probably upper back because we stand all day with our arms up. I train my stylists that work here and I try to give them good habits as far as posture, how to hold their scissors so they don't get carpal tunnel. There's a certain way that people hold their shears that will bring on carpal

tunnel much quicker. Anyone who cuts overhand is very susceptible to carpal tunnel. I make my staff cut palm to palm.

CT: So there's no bending in the wrists.

SD: Yeah, that stretching helps with carpal tunnel. Also girls especially, because I've trained so many of them, they do not bend their knees to adjust to the height of the client, they bend their hips and they throw their pelvis forward which causes significant stress on the low back, that's why more women have more problems with that. But I think also, of course after they bear children their back might be more compromised but I watch it all the time. It is a whole lot more physically demanding than a lot of people give it [credit for]...on the knees and everything else. But I think if you practice good posture and make sure that you move the client so you're not moving around the client, not hanging over the client, that's why the chairs go up and down and they spin.

CT: Are you concerned about the toxicity of the chemicals you use? I'm not sure how toxic peroxide is compared to other chemicals.

SD: You know every industry has its challenge and this is the life I have chosen. I wouldn't expect chemicals to be 100 percent safe and think *wow, this might hurt me*. I would say hair color, since it's used 100 percent more often than any other chemical in our industry that kind of gets overlooked now because it's so normal. But when you see all these articles about Keratin Treatments and formaldehyde, well formaldehyde has been in just about every beauty product and always has been, but now it's at the forefront.

CT: What else is it in?

SD: It's in a lot eye make-up, eye-liners, lip-liners...for 100 years, it's always been that way. It's the amount, that's where the problem comes in. So when somebody says, "I was on the internet and I saw that somebody's hair fell out from a Keratin Treatment." Well I've personally never seen that. I said, "If you are that concerned, then look up hair color and hair color side effects." Then they go, "oh" but it didn't stop them from getting their retouch. I have clients who are OBGYN's [Obstetrician/Gynecologists]. There's that whole [discussion] do you get hair color while you're pregnant or do you not get hair color while you're pregnant? Most doctors will say after the first trimester, you're safe. I have clients who are OB's [Obstetricians] who don't stop at all and they do it straight through their pregnancy. So, I think it's the American culture, we're going to do what we want to do to be beautiful and beautify ourselves. In the grand scheme of things, everything out there could kill you potentially. I think it's a small risk but the risk is still there and I don't deny that. It's reality.

CT: Do you think there should be any kind of regulations within the industry? It seems like for the most part, it's not regulated very much.

SD: I'm definitely not a big regulation fan. I believe there is practical regulation, I believe now with the information everybody has, a lot of it is false, and if you read between the lines, yeah, there's an inherent risk in just about everything that you do when you walk out the door everyday. If something is bad enough, people will stop using it and they won't get the service anymore. But it has not stopped anybody.

CT: Really the thing that is getting the most attention now is the Brazilian Blowout Treatment [also called the Keratin Treatment] because of the workers inhaling the fumes. You said you have a really good ventilation system, a lot of people don't. I don't have an opinion either way, I'm just curious because over 90 percent of all hair salons are independently owned, so even if they

wanted to try and regulate the industry, it's not feasible. You have an above the board, very nice salon and you have taken the time to have a safe place and I just wonder if you think it should be mandatory or not?

SD: I do think...like I said when I advertise and tell people what I do that's how I get more of the market share. So if you choose not to protect your clients and your staff as much as you possibly can with every known fail-safe that's out there, I say shame on you. And people have come here and tried us out that went to other salons because they know I'm carrying the latest and greatest. I drop my companies at the drop of a hat if I feel that their product is not what they represented to me, and I've done it many a time or if I see some other technology and they don't have it, then I'm moving on to the next, for my staff and for my clientele. It's just the way I believe. We invest the extra money. And I'm sure that's a big part, investing in that system is not cheap. The last couple of years, economically, it's not been a real fun ride. But that's how I look at it. You've got to do everything you possibly can to keep up with it. The Brazilian Blowout is actually a brand of a Keratin Treatment so it's not a service. A lot of people get it confused, they think Brazilian Blowout is what the Keratin is called. So ours is a Keratin Treatment made by another company.

CT: What company do you use?

SD: Cadiveu. But Brazilian Blowout, what they did was, they made a major misrepresentation and said they were formaldehyde-free and that's what brought the dogs on them. So people were using this and selling this as a formaldehyde-free product. So essentially, you're lying to your clients. And the salons truly did not know and that's why they have so many problems now. I believe there are a few states they are actually banned from. The last two lines I've used, we have it [formaldehyde] in there because right now the Keratin Treatments don't work unless there is that [formaldehyde] in there. There is a percentage OSHA allows .002 I believe is the legal amount that they allow so we stay well below that range.

CT: Again, really informative. What would you say is the biggest cost associated with doing this business?

SD: Financially?

CT: Yes.

SD: Well marketing is a huge component. We still see a lot of word-of-mouth business, which has always been a part of the hair industry. There's no better advertisement than to have somebody leave here and go to tennis practice or go to lunch and say, "Hey, where'd you get your hair done." So that's a huge part of it. The product costs now I would say over the last five, six years have gone up dramatically, energy costs have gone up dramatically and we're an energy-intensive industry, electric heating, air-conditioning...everything gets shipped to us and all our products are weight, you know we're not shipping foam. And good stylists deserve to be paid more than average stylists or bad stylists so which in my opinion is well worth the investment if they can produce the product that gives my salon a great reputation.

CT: Sounds like it's paying off.

SD: For us, we've been very fortunate. We made adjustments when things hit the fan and it's paid off. We just kept grinding away but I think because we forged such a great reputation, before everything went to heck. I did something that not a lot of salons did, because a lot of salons with fewer clients raised their prices. I actually froze our prices. We froze our prices for almost four or five years. I just had my personal price increase six months ago. I stayed that way

to try to be loyal to the clients who had been loyal to me. So we had to watch what we were doing in other areas.

CT: So have you noticed that much of a difference since the economy tanked?

SD: Just that initial hit shook things up and I just think shortly afterwards...you know Americans are only going to do without for so long and again, coming back to this business people will give up other things before they will give up their vanity. They just won't do it.

CT: Yes, you are right about that. Even social workers say the poorest of the poor, if they stop getting their hair done, something is wrong. That's a huge red flag that signals something is wrong and they go in and investigate what's going on with this client. People will find a way to get their hair done, if they can't afford the bus, hairdressers go to their house.

SD: Absolutely.

CT: It's an incredible business.

SD: I would say the people I deal with, which are a lot of professional women who are economically higher-end on the scale in this area, but people are still people and a lot of times these women need somebody to vent to and talk to. Myself and my staff may be the only people who *truly* listens to them everyday, all day, unencumbered without a kid hanging off their leg screaming "Ma, ma, ma, ma, ma!" Or husbands are away on business trips all the time, so we may be the only person who actually listens and talks to them, touches them.

CT: Do you feel like a therapist sometimes?

SD: I say that I am a psychology major and I only minor in hair, you know what I mean? So there is major psychology to it. Most of the time, truly it's just knowing to keep your mouth shut and listen.

CT: Do you share as much with them?

SD: Personally? No. I don't know if that's professional. It's not about you at all. And I tell the stylists every year, I move around in my salon and I like to hear the conversations and I tell people quickly, I'll say, "Do yourself a favor, this is not about you. If you want to talk about you, talk to me, but let them talk about them. That's really what they want, even if they ask you, they want to talk about them." It's part of what they pay for.

CT: What's the most old-fashioned hairstyle or technique that you do here?

SD: Old fashioned? I don't think there's that much new truly under the sun as far as this industry goes, I just think it gets re-circulated and improved on a little bit as far as what technology can provide. So we use round brushes now instead of roller sets.

CT: So you don't do roller sets here?

SD: The only set we do after we've blown it dry, we'll Velcro it [use Velcro rollers] for extra body to put it up for a wedding or bar mitzvah.

CT: Do you have any standing hairdryers?

SD: We have a rolling hairdryer and we bring it out for certain things, but we mostly blow-dry first and then we'll Velcro it. Or we have, what I personally use what are essentially round brushes where the handle comes off so you blow it dry and put the round brush in and pop it off, put a clamp on there and set it as I'm going. It's much quicker. But even that round brush technique is from the old roller set technique, it's just quicker, softer. The haircutting, you know Vidal Sassoon, in my opinion, even though there have been a lot of great stylists since him and haircutters, he pretty much did it all. He set the stage for it, people have taken it and maybe done it in reverse, where he was more structured they did deconstruction, but it's still based off of the same principles. So if you really hone those skills and put your little nuances in there...that's pretty much what I've done, I took a lot of what Vidal did and I've added little nuances here and there and that's what works for me and my staff. But it's [all] been done before, if you look hard enough.

CT: Yes, that's true for most things in our culture. Do you have health insurance?

SD: Yeah, we provide health insurance for staff members who are full-time employees. That's one of those things we've been trying to hang on to. But we believe that in order to give our employees something that they truly need, that's part of it. You know, they work for it.

CT: That's great. And what about plans for retirement?

SD: We have 401's that we can contribute to. We really try to stress, you know we have an accountant that we work with and we always make our accountant available, if our people are serious about this. The thing that you run into in this industry is young kids who make a decent buck and the only thing they can see in front of them is what they're wearing and the car they want to drive and where they're partying that weekend. So even when you make these plans available, and this includes health coverage too, they're not interested. And when it requires a contribution, we require a very small contribution toward health care, which we had just started last year because things got so outrageous, but they're not interested. They want to party. So the few stylists that I have who have children and families are definitely looking into that, but the bulk of this industry is *I take my cash on Friday and Saturday night I'm going to the club with my new duds*. That's really what this industry is all about, a bunch of crazy people.

CT: This was a really interesting interview. Was there anything we didn't talk about that you wanted to say?

SD: No, I think that's pretty much a good thumbnail sketch of the whole industry. It's more about people, relationships than it is about the actual hair.

CT: Do you go to hair shows or anything like that?

SD: I do. I go to different types of educational events now, where I used to just go to the show and the show is great for the young stylists who are looking for the flash and the bang and they want something to keep them going and inspire them and that's really what it does well. I go looking for the latest techniques that I can share and new tools that I can use.

CT: Do they have those classes there at the shows? Or do they have conferences that focus more on education and less of a big show?

SD: Some of them, like there's one in Vegas now that is geared towards...you have the biggest companies out there and they're basically trying to entice the youth because they know that the youth, works for the owner and the owners are not always up for the trendiest stuff. And then those kids come back and say, "Oh, well Redken came out with this new product. You gotta pick

Redken up.” Where truly what happened was Redken got a hold of them that day and said, “Hey we’re throwing this party tonight at this club called ‘The Game’ or whatever, free admission, free drinks” ...and suddenly, we love Redken! I know that, because I was there. I’ve done it before. But that’s what those type of shows focus on. I go to the Academy’s [shows] that are purely education [based]. I don’t have the time right now, I have two kids, a wife, a business. So the young guys go to that stuff.

CT: So if I was going to go to a show this year, what would you recommend?

SD: I would say the best show that I’ve ever gone to from an educational standpoint would be the Chicago IBS. That one’s really good. If you’re going to combine a show with education, the New York one is just okay. But if you’re truly going just for education than you’re going to go to a major company’s academy, if you’re going to put two to three days straight into education.

CT: What the story with Bumble & Bumble? I’ve heard from different stylists that they’re pushing this new hair cutting technique. I have a friend who owns a salon and she’s getting these young stylists who are trained by Bumble & Bumble but they’re not cutting hair like anything she’s ever seen, in her opinion it’s not very useful for her salon. Are there other companies that are trying to brand themselves in this different way?

SD: Sure, there’s a couple. Bumble & Bumble would be one of them. There is Widad they deal with very coarse, curly, ethnic hair. What they do is take their product line and they try to build a cutting technique around their product line. So Widad has this cutting technique that is based around the product line. So really it’s about selling product. Bumble & Bumble...not necessarily my preference, but do they have good products in their line? Sure they do. Every line has great products and every line has products that will just sit on the shelf. It’s just the way it goes. But Bumble & Bumble has a solid technique. Is it the greatest? You know unfortunately what happens is every person that sits in your chair, every texture that sits in your chair, you can’t use the same technique for everybody, so that’s where the experience comes in and I have tried to take everything I’ve learned over the years and tried to blend it in with a technique that gives my staff the option to say *okay, I know with this person’s hair, I’m not going to do a lot of this because Steve said that’s bad*. And then they develop their own experience in it and it becomes rock solid with them so. But every single haircutting technique is a play on Vidal Sassoon. There’s just no way around it. You can say it’s something else, there’s just no way around it, it is just a version of what he did.

CT: All roads lead to home.

SD: There’s no question. And there’s nothing wrong with adding your own twist. I give my stylist the hammer and nails but at the end of the day our houses are all going to look different, all quality, they’re just going to look different. So what you do with it is what really makes the variety. Too many people worry about the flash and bang when they’re cutting hair or coloring hair and they forget the foundation and that’s a weak house right there, it’s going to fall apart. You’re not going to get that return client because when they come back they’re going to want the same thing and that’s what 90 percent of the people in this industry want. When clients come back, if you can’t reproduce it because you don’t know how you got there...[you’re going to lose them]. You need a consistent stylist who will just stick to the basics and add their flair on at the end. I go from the foundation to the walls to the roof and then I go in and make my customizations, so to speak.

CT: Even in the waitressing world, that was the biggest complaint, these were women who had been waitressing all their lives, proud of their profession, they had been doing it 50, 60 years and they made a decent living actually and they said these young ones want to come in and just make

the money and go home and not tip out the bussers and not have enough respect for the profession to learn how to do it right or do it well. I think the direction our culture is moving in makes it harder to convince people to buckle down and pay their dues.

SD: It's the same in our industry now. The same scenarios as what you're saying about the waitresses. Stick to the basics, learn the game and then once you have that strong foundation, you can go out and you can do well, but a lot of these kids that are coming out of these schools they automatically think *I should be making this much* before they bring in a client. They think what they learn in school is enough to go out and deal with a high-end client as far as satisfying their technical needs and you only get one chance to make a reputation for yourself and if you're willing to go out and make a bad one you're going to have a hard time regaining yourself. Whereas my kids, when they come up they get exposed, little by little by little by little and when they hit that ground running and we start to market them and they're officially a stylist, they've had hundreds of heads in their hands. So they still have the experience portion that they have to build on but they're not going to make any grave mistakes. But you get the top guns and the hot shots, I call them "Rock Star Hairstylists." My salon has no room for "Rock Star Hairstylists." We don't deal with that. We don't deal with egos. We're symbiotic in our chemistry. Everybody knows when someone's having a good day or a bad day. But that ego, we have no place for that here. It's not a good sustaining formula...I don't think...it works in other places.

CT: It takes all kinds.

SD: Amen.

CT: [laughing] This was wonderful, thank you so much.

SD: My pleasure.

CT: This interview was really fantastic. Can I take a couple of photos of you?

SD: Sure.

[END]